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THE
GUILT OF A DENIAL
OF
GOD'S PROVIDENCE:

A
SERMON

ON
ZEPHANIAH I. 12.

BY THE VENERABLE
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PREFACE.

THE unhappy circumstances which have led the author to think it his duty, for the last two months, to confine himself in his public instructions exclusively to the topics of Divine Providence, general and particular, are well known to his readers. They have already been detailed by him in a note to his sermon of August 26, which was subsequently published by request.

Should the author's life, in the providence of God, be spared, he may, probably, at a future time, improve some season of sickness, or of comparative leisure, to revise, and to collect into one volume, the whole of the discourses which he has recently delivered upon this most interesting subject. In the meantime, he offers to the public what he believes may be the last of the series, as he has already had pleasure in presenting them with the first; and he recommends, to those who would consult the arguments of some abler writers on the subject, a perusal of the "*Discourse concerning the Divine Providence*," by Dean SHERLOCK; Section 6 of "*The Natural History of Enthusiasm*," (HOLDSWORTH, London, 1830); an article on "*Divine Visitations*" in the 22d number of that excellent quarterly periodical, "*The British Critic*;" and the Rev. W. R. WHITTINGHAM's admirable sermon preached in St. Luke's Church, New-York, on Tuesday, August 3, 1832, the day appointed by the Mayor and Common Council, of New York, for public humiliation and prayer, under God's recent visitation of that city by the devastation of pestilence.

For the view which the author has taken of Divine Visitations, he finds his warrant (to speak briefly) in this scripture—"Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos III. 6.) For the open manner in which he has given expression to his views upon the guilt of the denial of Divine Providence, he finds his warrant in this—"if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand." (Ezek. XXXIII. 6.) He did not dare to be silent; and, for the warmth and earnestness with which he has spoken, he finds his warrant in this—"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing," (Gal. V. 18.); or in this—"Thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot; so, then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth," (Rev. III. 15. 16.); but, lest any should mistake the nature of his feelings, although with him it is a very small thing that he should be judged of man's judg-

ment, (1 Cor. iv. 3.) he would yet secure the noble cause he feebly advocates from prejudice on *his* account; (Ps. LXIX. 6); he would, therefore, refer the reader to the 12th page of his former sermon; he would repeat that it is in love and tenderness and compassion, and, if he may speak it with humility, in the spirit of His Divine Master, not in bitterness, or anger, or strife, or contention, that he has arraigned the infidel. GOD is his witness that he may say of the most mischievous character whom he knows in society, from his inmost bosom—"Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." (2 Cor. ii. 4.)

A few sentences have been added since the delivery of this Sermon at St. John's Church, on Sunday Oct. 28, principally from THE ADDRESS delivered by the Author on the preceding Friday,—being the day appointed by Proclamation of His Excellency Sir THOMAS COCHRANE for a General Fast and Humiliation before ALMIGHTY GOD, to be observed in the most devout and solemn manner, by sending up our Prayers and Supplications to the DIVINE MAJESTY,—for obtaining Pardon of our Sins, and averting the heavy Judgments which our manifold Provocations have most justly deserved; and particularly for beseeching GOD to protect us from that grievous Disease with which several places in the United Kingdom and America are at this time visited.

SERMON.

I will search Jerusalem with candles and punish the men that are settled on their lees : that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good neither will He do evil.—ZEPHANIAH I. 12.

THESE are the words of the LORD, spoken by His prophet Zephaniah. This prophet lived in the time of Josiah, king of Judah, one of the virtuous princes of that people. His reign was remarkable for the restoration of the service of the true God and the destruction of the idols to the false and foolish worship of which the people had been seduced. Between his reign, however, and that of Hezekiah, who was an equally good prince, Manasseh and Amon had reigned. Of these two, Manasseh is as remarkable for his wickedness in the early part of his reign, as he is for the penitence which he exhibited in the latter part of it; while the short reign of Amon, the father of Josiah, was equally marked by wickedness throughout. The effect of the vices of these two successive princes was seen, as might be expected, in the corresponding wickedness of their people. When Josiah, therefore, came to the throne, he found much to lament in the state of his countrymen, much to reprove, and much to correct. The LORD was angry against them, and did not conceal His wrath, but proclaimed it by His prophet Zephaniah. In this prophet Josiah found a very valuable assistant in his projects for improving the religious and moral condition of the people committed to his charge. Faithful prophets have ever been dear to godly princes. Under the gospel,

as well as under the law, virtuous princes have ever been ready to acknowledge with gratitude the aid which they have received in the formation of their own characters, and in their purposes of good for others, from men of God who would "constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake."* Our profession makes it our peculiar duty to teach men, among other their obligations, those which they owe to the state, the duty of allegiance to the laws of God, and to those authorities which are ordained of God;† and, if, in return for such services, the prince should recognize his own duty to uphold true religion,—none but those who are opposed to true religion can, with any shew of reason, oppose themselves to that outward dignity and imposing sanction which, consistently with the reservation, to all, of the sacred rights of conscience, true religion may obtain from having that prophecy accomplished in her behalf that Kings should be her nursing fathers and their Queens her nursing mothers.‡ Alas! the fact cannot be concealed that the jaundiced eye and the perverted mind of many of the enemies of all establishments will discern nothing to admire, no beauty nor comeliness§ in the state of things when the religion of the Redeemer shall be established in the hearts of His people||—nothing but the reign of prejudice and priestcraft and illusion and superstition when that meek and mild and tolerant form of Religion shall be dominant which is the object of the Christian supplication—**THY KINGDOM COME!** the subject of the evangelical prophecies that it shall, one day, **BRUISE THE SERPENT'S HEAD,*** and cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

* Collect for St. John Baptist's Day.

† Prov. xxiv. 21. I. Pet. ii. 17. Rom. xiii. 1—7.

‡ Isaiah xlix. 23. § Isaiah liii. 2.

|| Isaiah xlii. 3. Zech. xii. 10.

* Gen. iii. 15. Isai. xi. 9. Hab. ii. 14.

King Josiah was a nursing father to the church, and Zephaniah, from whose short prophecy my text is taken, was a faithful man of God, ready to further the Prince's views for the improvement of his subjects.

Among the more shocking enormities of which the people were guilty in the time of Zephaniah, and for which he was commissioned to denounce upon them the anger of God, was A DENIAL OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

But I will not anticipate the regular division of my text. There are four subjects in it; three of which require some explanation, and the fourth indeed all of them, our most serious consideration.

THE FIRST is the meaning of the expression the LORD would search the city with candles: NEXT is the meaning of the character which is given to the persons for whom the LORD would thus search; they were persons who had "settled upon their lees": NEXT follows one of the false notions of the men in question—they say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will He do evil; in fact they secretly doubt the Providence of God: and LASTLY, I will say a few words of the fate of such persons; God declares that He will search them out and punish them. May God give His blessing to the words which I may speak, that they may be made instruments in His hand of bringing into the way of truth such as have erred and are deceived, that they may yet hear meekly His Word, receive it with pure affection, and bring forth the fruits of THE SPIRIT.†

I. *I will search Jerusalem with candles.*

We may discover the meaning of this expression by comparing it with one or two other passages in the Bible where it is also used. When Solomon (at Prov. xx. 27) would express that God gave

† Litany.

men reason and understanding that they might keep a strict guard over their tempers and inclinations, he says—"The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts." We use a candle, when, like the woman, in the parable, who was in search of a lost piece of money † we would throw light into the darkest places and most secret corners. The Lord's using a candle is, therefore, a term easy to be understood. It describes the strictness of His search, the minute scrutiny which he will apply, when He shall bring particular visitations upon us for our iniquities, or summon us to His general Judgment. He is frequently said, by a like expression, and with a like reference, to be a searcher of the very hearts and reins of men. Indeed He not only knows perfectly all the conduct of every man, our most secret doings, but He also knows the hidden motives, the disguised intentions of our actions. He understands the thoughts long before; ‖—He can probe into the heart and conscience, convict the most specious hypocrites of their secret guilt, and awaken, by His judgments, the most seemingly secure.

When this all-knowing God shall take upon Himself the examination of a city, or of a people, alas! who shall abide His trial? Is there no city now of which God might say, as once He said of Sodom, (Gen. xviii. 32) "I will not destroy it for ten's sake"—and the TEN might be sought in it, as they were there sought, in vain? Nay—is there, think you, now, of which He might say, as He once did to Jeremiah, concerning Jerusalem, (Jer. v. 1) "Run ye to and fro through the streets, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find A MAN, if there be *any* that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it;"—and that ONE be sought in vain?—Would *you*, or *you*, or *you* be the man? Would

† Luke xv. 8.

‖ Ps. cxxxix. 2.

your neighbor be the man? Do you *know* the man without a fault who could stand between the guilty city and the wrath of God, to appease it? Nay—is there no city the iniquities of which may be so great that God may say of it, that, though He has in it some true followers, some who have not bowed the knee to Baal, (1. Kings xix. 18,) He will yet destroy it? ---Son of man! When the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, and I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it—though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter, they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. (Ezek. xiv. 13—20.)

O, my friends! This God, whose judgments are so terrible, is always present. We have an eye above us to which our most retired actions,—those done in the darkness of night and in the privacy of the secret chamber, are open—we have over us one who can discern the very thoughts and imaginations of the heart. Let us take heed, then, to our hearts—to our lips—and to our ways!

That improper thought which *you* whispered with intention of seduction, into the ear of one too ready to listen to it—was heard by the God of purity! That action of uncleanness by which *you* polluted that body which should be the Temple of the Holy Spirit, was seen by God!—That dishonest advantage which *you* took of your neighbour;—that falsehood of which no earthly being can convict *you*; are known to Him. All you think, or say, or do, is known to God. The most trifling word, and work and thought, will make an item, too, in your account at the day of judgment. When the Lord comes He will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: Every man's work shall be made manifest, for that day shall discover it, because it shall be re-

vealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. (1. Cor. iv. 5. iii. 13.)

II. The next matter which calls for explanation is the character given by the prophets of the persons for whom the LORD would make so strict a search. They were men who were "settled upon the lees."

The same expression is applied by Jeremiah (XLVIII. 11.) to Moab. It is there accompanied with other allusions of the same kind which make the comparison quite plain. When the Jews wished wine to become clear they did not change it from one vessel into another, but let it remain still and quiet upon it's lees or grounds. Hence settling on the lees came to mean, by a figure, the remaining quiet and at ease. Thus Jeremiah says of Moab—"Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel." That is, this people has not been subject to changes and calamities, "neither hath he gone into captivity, therefore his taste remaineth in him," i. e. he has not repented and forsaken his old sins, "and his scent is not changed," his evil dispositions are not removed. Now, by the light of this passage, we may discover what is meant, when it is said, in the text, of some of the people of Jerusalem, that they were settled on the lees. They were persons who had experienced uninterrupted prosperity and ease, and had not made the proper improvement of their privileges. They had abused the merciful indulgence of God. They thought themselves secure in their present possessions, and, in their enjoyment of His gif's, they did not regard the giver of all good things.

Are there none of us of whom it may be said, with equal truth, that we are settled upon the lees? Have none of us been so long favored by the indulgence of God that we have almost ceased to acknowledge Him as the author of blessings which have been so continually bestowed? If we do return Him

thanks, are not our manner and our spirit rather those of the indistinct and heartless whisper of the grace of a common meal, than of the pious ejaculation, the fervent praise, the glad thanksgiving, from the heart overflowing with devotion?—Ah! my friends! we do not thank God sufficiently—we do not *feel* sufficiently thankful to Him for His continued daily and hourly blessings. Why, we are, some of us, kept in the enjoyment of the luxuries—all of us in the enjoyment of the necessities—of life;—nay, all of us in the possession of life itself—by His bounty alone! Some before me have been at ease from their youth. They have never been called to mourn for the loss of dear relative or friend! They have never been stretched, themselves, upon the bed of suffering! Some have never shed a tear, except of petulant sorrow! Yet how have we acknowledged God for such kindness? Have we given Him our hearts? Have we given Him ourselves? In the devout spirit of that prayer which the Church appoints to be used in the time of prevailing sickness by those who, like ourselves, are mercifully spared, do we “offer unto God’s fatherly goodness, ourselves, our souls and bodies, which He has delivered—to be a living sacrifice unto Him, always praising and magnifying His mercies in the midst of His Church, through Jesus CHRIST our LORD”?—Or are we, even now, while the judgments of God are visibly abroad,—thoughtless of them—regardless of the author of these dreadful visitations—careless, thankless, and still spiritually indolent—“settled upon the lees”?

O let us beware how we thus tempt God! When He sees that the effect of our having been thus at ease from our youth, and of our having heard of public fasts and of national humiliations only as matter of past history, is only that our taste remains and our scent is not changed—i. e. that our natural corruptions are left unsubdued, and that our careless-

ness, and thoughtlessness, and neglect of prayer, of confession, and of acknowledgement of God, could not be greater, if we did not believe in His existence:—When He sees that the effect of our having been indulged in prosperity and health and quiet is this settling upon the lees—How justly may He shake us up and disturb us, and bring upon us persecution and captivity, pestilence and famine and adversity and misery! How justly may He empty us from vessel to vessel,—subject us, that is, to such calamitous changes as may make our state cloudy, and may force us to acknowledge Him even though it be in the time of justice, and then too late to cry for mercy.* O! then, entreat, in the spirit of your special prayer,† that the grace may be given you to turn unto God with timely repentance, and thus to obtain, through the merits of your Savior, that pardon today which tomorrow it may be too late to seek for. Pray that your repentance, too, may be deep and lasting. Beware of the fate of Nineveh. Though she was spared, on her repentance, when Jonah preached unto her, yet all the wrath of God was executed upon her to the uttermost when the Prophet of our text afterwards foretold her ruin.

III. I will now proceed to say a few words on the false opinion of which the men in question, for whom the LORD would institute so strict a search, were convicted—They say in their heart “The LORD will not do good, neither will He do evil!”

The principles of these atheists led them to suppose that God would not concern Himself about the moral government of the world,—that the good or evil which men did was indifferent to Him—that He would not deal out to them good or evil according as their works deserved—that good and evil happened to men, without God’s contrivance or

* Commination Service.

† Appointed to be used for averting the dreadful pestilence now raging in Europe and parts of America.

control, entirely by chance, by agency of other men, or by natural causes. They thought that God, having made the world and set it in motion, left it to be governed by its own laws;—that, having given fixed laws to nature, He did not overrule these laws and make them subservient to His will and government.

Short-sighted men! who could imagine that God could not exercise, or would not exercise, an effectual control over the actions of men who are the work of His own hands—that He would think it beneath Him to overlook the creatures whom He did not think it beneath Him to call into being:—as though this heaven, this earth, this fair creation, which required a God to put them into motion at the first, could be kept in order for a moment,—could, for an instant, be preserved from clashing back into their original confusion,—if the hand of the same Almighty Being were not still ruling at the helm, and His voice, which called them forth, were not still ordering the jarring elements to be at peace!

In the days of David there were some who said in their heart—God has forgotten: God hides away His face and will never see: How does God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? The Lord shall not see: The God of Jacob shall not regard it. (Ps. x. 11. LXXIII. 11. xciv. 7.) But what is the reply of David, or rather what does God Himself say by the mouth of His servant David?—He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not He correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are VANITY. (Ps. xciv. 9—11.)

Indeed, as I have sufficiently proved to you from scripture, from reason, and from experience, in the lectures which the unhappy prevalence of infidelity

has lately called forth,—God does, by His providence, overrule all which happens upon earth. Natural events, fortuitous or chance events, and those which have our fellow-men for their agents, all are permitted, ordered, or overruled, to the purposes of His moral government, by God. The liberty of human action is not impaired—the influence of natural causes is not abated, or shackled; yet these, and the very events which are contingent, i. e. which may happen, or may not, are directed by His unseen hand, to subserve the purposes of His moral government. At His bidding the soil may become, at a particular time, fruitful under particular natural influences, or, from like cause, barren. The air may become pestilential, or charged, as of late, with death; or, at His bidding may continue, as we now thank Him that, amid His present visitations on other countries, and on other parts of our own, it has still continued among us—healthful. The works of His hands, when He is disposed to punish, or reward men, by them, are made to fulfil His commands and to be obedient to the voice of His word.

O, be you not guilty, my beloved! of the folly of those men who say in their heart—the LORD will not do good, neither will He do evil. Is it agreeable to reason or to analogy to suppose that God would have put forth all the skill which is shown in the mechanism of the very meanest of His creatures, if He could have thought them, after their creation, unworthy of His government and care? Would He have sent His only Son to redeem us from our sins, if our works were, indeed, indifferent to Him? O would our Divine Redeemer JESUS CHRIST have sustained such agonies of prayer, have suffered so intensely, and have died upon the ignominious cross for us? Would He have left such laws for the regulation of our hearts and conduct and conversation? Would He have enforced His precepts with such awful sanctions? Would He have sent the HOLY

SPiRiT of sanctification to abide in the hearts of His followers, and to convince them of sin, if the public acts of nations and the private deeds of individuals were, indeed, indifferent to Him—if the belief of the probability of mysterious visitations of Providence, in return for a people's sins, were, indeed, an illusion of superstition?

God will, indeed, recompense good and evil.—The contrary supposition, as I have proved in my late lectures on Divine Providence, is against all experience: The testimony of the very heathen is against it; Reason remonstrates against it strongly: Our natural yearnings for the protection of our all-powerful parent are against it: The WORD OF GOD, in every page, condemns it. But to my text;---

IV. That says of those who hold this senseless notion, that God will search them out and punish them.

And, my Brethren! if punishment shall be hereafter, in any degree, proportioned to the offence, how great, how fearfully great, according to our thinking, may their punishment be, who shall, through life, have dared to dispute their own accountability, and shall have *affected* to believe (for we can scarce imagine the atheist sincere) that God will not concern Himself to do good or to do evil! The text, however, would seem to favor the supposition, unaccountable as it is, that there may be sincerity even in this senseless and gloomy creed! **THEY SAY IT IN THEIR HEART!**

O! God does not judge as man judges; He sees the force with which bad education, prejudice, evil company, or injurious reading, may have pressed down the natural aspirings of the soul;—He discerns the sad effect which the inconsistent, the disgraceful lives and tempers of us who call ourselves christians may have had in fixing his unbelief upon the infidel; He knows the constitutional weakness, too, of a particular unbeliever's mind, his incompetency for

weighing evidence, or fathoming arguments, which must make him, in the estimation of the amiable here, and—grant it, God! perhaps with *THEE* above, rather an object of pity than of censure. As God is a merciful God, and does not expect to gather where He has not sowed, He may pardon errors in extenuation of which so much may be allowed:

Sincerity in error, however, I am bound to warn you, my christian friends! cannot be safe.* We may not calculate upon security under the plea that we are sincere;—that we have not believed such and such mysteries of religion, for instance, and that we could not believe them. Look to the text; I will search out and punish---not those who *say* "God will not do good or evil:" A person might utter this egregious absurdity without believing it, from an affectation of singularity, from a desire to raise the dignity of fancied philosophy;---but I will punish even those *who say it in their heart*, who are sincere in their error, who really imagine there is truth and even wisdom in the foolishness and falsehood of which we are treating.

O, my brethren! if such be the fate of those who, even in secret, harbor this unbelief,—if they who *doubt* God's Providence thus offend Him---and we have here the Word of God for our charitable apprehension that they do,---what shall be our hope if we should openly *deny* Him? If I be amenable to such punishment for merely saying in my heart that good and evil may happen without God, what, what may be my lot if I should vent my unbelief

* The unsoundness and the danger of the popular notion that sincerity may be substituted for faith, is very ably shewn in a Sermon by Bishop HORNE on the necessity of Believing,—Vol. IV. Sermon I. on Mark XVI. 15, 16. On the same subject the reader may also consult an excellent essay contained in the 73d number of *THE CHURCHMAN*, a periodical which is published every Saturday in the City of New-York, and cannot be too highly recommended.

in conversation or in writing? Will God be so seriously offended, make so strict a search and punish so signally the man who shall foster secret atheism in the retirement of his own bosom—What, then, shall we say of those for whom we need no candles to search them out,---who shall, without a blush, bring forth the unnatural monster to the light,---who shall dress it with the trappings of a false philosophy, and teach it the insidious smile of her whose path goes down to hell,---and send it forth, like Satan on a festival day, to walk up and down this fair earth with the Sons of God?---What, but that the spirit which could prompt such proselytism is worthy the zeal and apostleship of that being who could suggest to us that we curse our God and die?*

Is not corrupt passion strong enough even within the bosoms of those who do believe in the overruling providence of God? Are there not difficulties enough in the way of a sincere profession of religion, but the check which the belief in an ever-present God imposes on vice, and the encouragement it gives to deeds of virtue, and humble resignation, and patient bearing, must be done away?—O! my brethren! if in the inmost heart of any of you there lurk one particle of this unbelief—pray to God, this night, to root it out. Search, search yourselves, that you may be spared in the day of the scrutiny described in the text. Breathe not a whisper of such secret doubt to the unsettling of the simple faith of another! If you do, the effects may be smouldering and gathering strength and spreading their festering influence upon generations yet to come,—a savor of death, increasing the numbers of the damned,—years after you shall have turned, in penitence and tears, to the God whom you have slighted†—years after you would give worlds, if you had them, that you

* Proverbs vii. Job i. 6—11, and ii. 9.

† Zechariah xii. 10. Acts ix. 4.

might recal the hell-born sentiment,[‡] which, though uttered in confidence in the ear of night, could not fall to the ground without your Maker's knowlege, or without being, to others, a savor of life or of death, according as those who were so unhappy as to hear it, turned to God on hearing it,—or to the human—say, the satanic—reasonings which dispute God's perfections, His providence, or His attributes. §

As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbor and saith, am I not in sport? Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ||

O believe me, an hour is coming in which, though you may now say, in your heart, "The LORD will not do good, neither will He do evil," you will turn to the LORD:—God grant that it may not be too late! * Indeed, indeed, whatever may have been your disposition during the hours of health and ease—whatever may have been your declarations, sincere or insincere, respecting your belief that the doctrine of a Divine Providence was contrary to reason and unworthy of philosophy, and an illusion of superstition—there will be no such pride of reason, no such irritable dignity of science, no such

[‡] Matt. XII. 36. Ps. xciv. 9.

§ What are we to say of the system, which, under a false shew of liberality, allows works to be circulated which produce the most atrocious crimes? If I administer poison to the body I am hanged; but if I administer poison to the mind,—if I corrupt and betray the ignorant,—if I deceive him, and make him a murderer and a suicide,—the friends of light and knowlege would raise a howl of "persecution" and "bigotry" if any attempt should be made to stop me in my course.—*Remarks on Messrs. Carlile and Taylor*: CHRISTIAN REMEMBRANCE for Sept. 1832.

|| Prov. xxvi. 18, 19. Matt. xviii. 6.

* Philipp. ii. 10, 11. Proverbs i. 24—33.

jealous dread of the imputation of superstition, in the hour of death!—In those moments of extremity the prevailing cry, even of those least likely to be suspected of superstition, has not been—"Return, health! return, tumultuous joy! return, political triumph! return, friends of my youth! return, worldly treasure,—or studies of philosophy,—or secular occupation!" Such cries are then known to be vain. Some of these former objects of preference and of delight are placed for ever out of reach. Those which remain, and those which might be regained at a call, are powerless, utterly unable to help or comfort, and no longer objects of desire. You will, then, be no longer able or inclined to console yourself with the idea of protection beneath the general law of nature. Your prayer and your confession will then be directed to that Being who will alone be able to help you.—**RETURN, O LORD!**† Your acknowledgement of the source of your suffering, too, will not stop short of the same Almighty cause. You will, then, no longer upbraid nature, or man, or accident, as the supreme cause of your calamity. You will no longer rest in the belief and the acknowledgement of mere secondary causes.—You will see that God is the Prime Universal Mover, whether the calamity which lays you low be the effect of natural decay, of physical derangement, or atmospheric influence, or mephitic vapor, or of man's malice, or of seeming accident. Your confession of Divine Providence, under its mysterious as well as under its more ordinary visitations, will be embodied in the prayer—**Turn Thee, O LORD, to Thy retreating creature, My LORD, and my God!**

On what, too, will you ground your confidence that the God whom you acknowledge will be pleased to save you and deliver you? Although you shall, all along, have acknowledged your belief that God

† Ps. vi. 4.

will do good, and will do evil, and shall also have expected that He will give to every man according as his works shall be, yet you will not dare to ask for deliverance as the reward of merit and of service: You will not presume to carry a lie in your right hand, † and to say "I have fulfilled," or even "I have sincerely *endeavored* to fulfil, those purposes of good for which I was placed, by the 'God of Nature,' in this state of being." No! however complacently you may, while setting on the lees in the time of careless security, have regarded your own public services, your own social virtues, or the idols of your heart's attachment,—your philosophy, or your philanthropy,—dare you—will you dare—in the day of God's nearer visitation, take *any* of these, or *all* of these, and plead them before your Maker, and say—Having fulfilled, or endeavored to fulfil, the purposes for which I was placed in this state of being, I now claim my reward?

Such awful presumption is not bred within the atmosphere of the sick room, or of the chamber of death! Bright, indeed, are the glories, and rich the privileges, which beam upon the last earthly moments of departing worth! But these glories and those privileges, and those prospects which are connected with them, are the attendants of Faith. The merits to which those who would *then* be comforted, must look, are the merits of a Savior's sacrifice! The fulfilment of God's purposes, on which those may boast who would *then* trust in a staff which can support them, must be the fulfilment of God's everlasting purposes of mercy by JESUS CHRIST our LORD. The achievements of our own from which, if from any, we can on the day of the soul's departure from the body, or on the yet more awful day of their reunion, derive satisfaction, must be the firmness and constancy of our faith amidst prevailing un-

† Isai. XLIV. 20.

belief—the testimony which we have borne to JESUS CHRIST by our lips and in our lives, in the midst of infidel indifference, senseless ridicule, and ungodly carelessness,—the triumphs over corrupt affection, lurking unbelief, evil passion, and selfishness and pride. The life of faith and the little nameless incidents which mark, and make up the life of the man of faith, may, then, pass in review without dismay. The cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, and for the sake of CHRIST, may then be remembered with delight, and acknowledged with favor, when schemes of universal benevolence, which have been unsanctified in their motive and unhallowed in the means which they employed, shall be unacknowledged, or even counted sinfulness. The farthing given from an honest hand for the support of religion; the poor person's mite thrown into the treasury of the sanctuary, with the heartfelt prayer for the promotion of christian knowledge at home, and the propagation of the gospel abroad; the word fitly spoken which God blessed as the instrument of a single sinner's turning to righteousness; the sigh over prevailing blasphemy, and the supplication over inward corruption, which were unheard and unnoted by man; the sacrifices of self-indulgence which were made to charity, and of which none knew but God;—these, and the daily incidents, the hourly dispositions which characterize the genuineness of an evangelical faith—these are the achievements of his life, which, if *any* can, may give one of our fallen race some comfort in the hour of distress and danger.

Yet these achievements—these triumphs—these dispositions—these sacrifices of self—are not his own!—They are graces of God, and are given him by the HOLY SPIRIT. He who has the most of these to recal to his mind will be the least disposed to put his trust on them, or on any deservings of his own. Especially in that moment when he is sensibly

approaching nearer to God, a portion of that clearness of vision through which God spies iniquity, even in our most holy things, will be granted to him. On getting nearer to the borders of yon realms of purity, he will perceive and lament, more than ever before, his own uncleanness. On the eve of his admission into those regions where activity in the service of God is the bliss of the inhabitants, he will, more than ever, lament his own uniform activity to evil and his indolence to good. He will confess that he is unworthy, utterly unworthy, of being admitted; but will pray that he may be pardoned and accepted and saved, for God's mercies' sake in JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

And, O, my friends! what an abundant plea is this! I trust you all are wont to urge it, or may be led to urge it, without ceasing, in all time of your tribulation, and in all time of your wealth, as you will in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. * Whether we approach God in the time of bodily ease for our soul's deliverance, or pray to Him, in time of bodily and mental suffering—"LORD! save US FOR THY MERCIES' SAKE!"—what a boundless field of mercies, past, present, and in prospect, is opened upon our contemplation!

Light and life—the varied blessings of providence and grace,—of providence, perhaps, denied—of grace, perhaps, abused,—long years of freedom from pain—the indulgence of settling on our lees—or perhaps the very discipline of pain by which a father chastises the child he loves—all, all these are various proofs of God's love, gifts of His bounty, exercises of His mercy. And what confidence does their past experience afford for the future to those who trust in Him and who believe in their heart that He doeth good and doeth evil!

* Litany.

He who has so long sustained us will not now desert us! He who has so often called me to repentance, the veriest sinner may say, will not refuse my request now that I turn to Him with hearty penitence and unfeigned submission, and throw myself at the foot of the cross of my **DIVINE REDEEMER**.

We do not plead our own merits, but Thy mercies, **O LORD!** Thy rich and unspeakable mercies in **JESUS CHRIST** our **LORD!**

On those who are yet impenitent and unbelieving, —on those who have even ridiculed the doctrine of Thy Providence, and have mocked at the efficacy of humiliation to avert Thy judgments,—turn, **O LORD**, as Thou didst once turn on **PETER**§ who denied Thee, and once again on **THOMAS** who doubted Thee, that they may yet weep with the penitence of the one, and confess Thee their **LORD**, and their **GOD**, with the faith of the other; and, **O!** whenever, beneath the afflictions which Thou sendest in mercy, we turn to Thee in supplication and mourning and tears, do Thou turn also to us, **O LORD!** remember Thy covenant and Thy promise. **O** save our souls for Thy mercies' sake. **AMEN!**

§ Luke xxii. 61. John xx. 24—29.